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DE RUEHRB #0400/01 1281003
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 071003Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8513
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 4047

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RABAT 000400

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/17/2018
TAGS: [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [ASEC](#) [MO](#) [XA](#) [XF](#)
SUBJECT: EXTREMISM AND TERROR IN MOROCCO PART II: PERCEIVED
INJUSTICE IS THE KEY DRIVER

REF: A. RABAT 398 (NOTAL)
[1](#)B. RABAT 112 (NOTAL)

Classified by Ambassador Thomas Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

-- This is the second of a three-part cable series on
Extremism and Terror in Morocco

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and Introduction: In today's Morocco, social alienation and perceived injustice are the key factors driving extremism and terror recruitment. Poverty is not the main determinant, although it clearly contributes to social alienation. Many Moroccan terrorists have come from the country's worst slums, but others have been drawn from the middle class. The common denominator is frustration, growing from perceptions of marginalization and opportunities denied. Invisible but real psychological frontiers divide the masses from the francophone elite that rules the country. These factors become volatile when mixed with socio-political outrage directed at U.S. or Israeli actions abroad or perceived local injustice at home, and is fanned by regional media and the Internet.

[1](#)2. (C) Recruitment itself is more concentrated. In Morocco, as elsewhere, entry into the world of violent extremism depends on personal networks, sometimes through mosques or subgroups within mosques. One of the vectors for such recruitment is the "captive" audience in prisons, where existing extremists have close and continuous contact with an already aggrieved and alienated population.

[1](#)3. (C) While there is little public support for acts of terrorism conducted inside the country, many Moroccans consider terror committed by Hamas or Hizballah to be legitimate resistance against occupation. There is also vague but tangible public support for the "Iraqi resistance," a factor underlined by recent remarks of a senior member of the Islamist Justice and Development Party - the second largest in Parliament. A previous cable looked at the historical and doctrinal antecedents to extremism in contemporary Morocco. A forthcoming cable will offer an assessment of the GOM's response. End summary and introduction.

Terror Incubators

[1](#)4. (C) Most of the perpetrators of the May 16, 2003 bombings in Casablanca, which killed 33 civilians and 12 suicide bombers, emerged from Sidi Moumen, the enormous slum on the fringes of the city. The leader of an NGO providing social services in Sidi Moumen recently told us the people of the neighborhood perceive "psychological frontiers" separating them from the rest of the country, observing that "they don't even feel like Moroccans." Outside elites periodically visit

the quarter, pledge their solidarity, and then quickly move on, leaving little tangible in their wake.

¶5. (C) Similarly, Jema'a Mezouaq, an isolated low income neighborhood at the edge of Tetouan, produced five of the eleven 2004 Madrid train bombers, and at least a dozen known cases of Iraq-bound foreign fighters since 2003 (ref B). Tetouan's Jema'a Mezouaq grew in the 1990's from a tiny village to a sizeable slum in a haphazard fashion, with no paved roads, and virtually no public services. Though adjacent to urban Tetouan, its location on a rugged hillside physically amplified the residents' sense of isolation. As in Sidi Moumen, small informal mosques, operating with little notice and no supervision from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, hosted preachers with a radical Salafist orientation, who held sway over young men with tenuous connections to broader Moroccan society and dim economic prospects.

But Not All Come From the Slum

¶6. (C) Perceptions of injustice that can lead to extremism are not only experienced by poor residents of marginalized neighborhoods. Hicham Doukkali, who unsuccessfully tried to detonate himself in front of a bus carrying tourists in Meknes in the summer of 2007, was a civil engineer by training. He reportedly aspired to a career as a military officer, but he lacked the connections needed to get admitted to the academy. Eventually obtaining a civil engineering degree, Doukkali was unable to find work in his field, and ended up employed as a clerk in a local tax office.

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¶7. (C) Embittered and disillusioned, Doukkali fell under the sway of extremist religious teachings, particularly those conveyed over the Internet, and also eventually learned to construct a crude IED by consulting extremist websites. Though few actually turn to terrorism, Doukkali's professional frustrations have been shared by millions of young Moroccans who perceive themselves shut out of a closed system in which elites take care of their own and the masses are left to fend for themselves.

¶8. (C) Moroccan security forces routinely increase their alert level during the summer holiday season as Moroccans resident in Europe flock back visit. Wahabbi organizations, well established and well resourced in Europe, have made an impact on Moroccan expatriate communities there. Though generally better housed and better fed than they were at home, many Moroccans living in Western Europe do not integrate into their host countries' societies. Ensuing social alienation, and disillusion with the promise of a better life, seem to contribute to the hardening of attitudes, and openness to violence, of some Moroccan emigres there. The Moroccans implicated in the 2004 Madrid train bombings, who had lived and worked in Spain for some time before they acted, are a case in point.

¶9. (C) The Moroccan experience bears out the growing consensus among academic researchers of the centrality of social networks and family ties in the recruitment process. The Raydi brothers (ref A), and two other brothers who blew themselves up near USG facilities in Casablanca on April 14, 2007, demonstrate that extremism and commitment to violence often moves between siblings or intimate friends, even when they outwardly appear to hold different ideological orientations. Personal loyalties may trump ideology as individuals decide to take the plunge into active (and often suicidal) terrorist operations.

New Media Amplify Anger over External Events

¶10. (C) Moroccans who turn to terror combine their bitterness and alienation from personal experiences with profound anger from perceived injustices perpetrated against Islam and fellow Muslims around the world. With the satellite TV and digital revolutions of the past ten years, this factor has been exponentially magnified. Across Morocco, even in the poorest shantytowns, satellite dishes are ubiquitous. Potent images of civilian suffering in Palestine, Iraq, and Lebanon, inflammatory accounts of the U.S. detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, and more recently, perceived slurs against Islam originating in Denmark and Holland, are continually broadcast on pan Arab satellites, fueling passionate anger toward the West in general, and the U.S. and Israel in particular, among the Moroccan public.

¶11. (C) Religiously oriented satellite channels such as Iqra, Ar-Risala, and Al-Fajr, which all enjoy substantial audiences in Morocco, regularly tap into emotions aroused by Middle East violence, emphasizing Islamic solidarity and placing the conflicts in a theological context. Extremist websites, which seem to pop up or migrate as quickly as the government and Moroccan ISPs can block them, take their audience to the third step, calling for violent responses against the perceived aggressors in a global war on Islam, and often provide practical advice on how young Muslims can take (violent) action.

¶12. (C) The growth of Internet availability and use in Morocco is impressive. Internet penetration has grown from 50,000 users in 1999 to more than 3.4 million broadband subscribers by 2006. With the proliferation of Internet cafes in urban and rural settings across Morocco, anyone can anonymously access almost any site for a minimal charge. The Government is hard pressed to keep track of the thousands of connections being made online at any given time. The GOM is concerned about the Internet's potential as a recruitment tool, as a technical resource for terrorists (as the summer 2007 Meknes bomber learned online how to construct a crude TATP bomb) and for its possible role as a medium to convey operational instructions from anywhere to terrorists inside Morocco. There is speculation that Abdelfatah Raydi, who blew himself up in a Casablanca cybercafe in March 2007, might have been logging in to get instructions on what to do with the bomb he was carrying.

A Captive Audience

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¶13. (C) One of the most concentrated vectors for such recruitment is the "captive" audience in prisons where existing extremists have close and continuous contact with already an aggrieved and alienated prison population. Through hunger strikes and other means, Salafist inmates have won significant concessions from prison authorities, exercising significant autonomy in their cell blocks, where they have been allowed to conduct their own theological seminars and enjoy conjugal visits, cell phones, and other privileges with minimal restrictions. (Note: The lax supervision on the Islamist prisoners' activities is widely thought to have facilitated the April 2 escape from Kenitra Prison of nine Salafists, including some convicted in connection with the 2003 Casablanca bombings. End note.) The role of prisons as a venue for networking and possible recruitment among extremists is increasingly attracting the GOM's attention. ReQntly there are indications that in response the Government is tightening controls.

Who's a Terrorist, Who's a Freedom Fighter?

¶14. (C) There is no consensus within Moroccan society over

the definition of terrorism. Though difficult to quantify, public support for Hamas and Hizballah is broad and deep. Many characterize Israeli military operations against the groups as "state terrorism," focusing on the civilian casualties such operations often cause, and consider Qassam rockets, and even suicide bombings directed at Israelis, legitimate reactions to "aggression" and "occupation." Likewise, while most Moroccans deplore attacks targeting Iraqi citizens, many are also supportive of the "Iraqi resistance" (though they are generally unable to articulate whom in the "Iraqi resistance" they support) and do not consider attacks on coalition forces in Iraq to be terrorism. Mustafa Ramid, parliamentary caucus leader for the Islamist Justice and Development Party, which holds the second-largest bloc of seats in the lower house, reflected this widely held view when he asserted during a party conference in mid-April that Morocco's anti-terrorism laws should not be applied to Moroccans who go to Iraq to battle coalition forces. Further blurring the definition, the GOM occasionally implicitly accuses political opponents of involvement in terrorism.

¶15. (C) Moral support among the public for Hamas et. al. notwithstanding, we do not detect any support in broader Moroccan society for attacks against foreign or government targets within the country. Despite a lively market for fundamentalist and Salafist recordings and literature, the absence of posters, night-letters, or grafitti extolling "martyr" bombers suggests little support for domestic extremist violence. The apparently consistent success of Moroccan security forces against jihadist terrorists also reflects the public's rejection of extremist violence on the domestic stage. For example, a tip-off from suspicious neighbors exposed a makeshift bomb factory in the Casablanca neighborhood of Moulay Rachid in the spring of 2007.

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